



San Luis Valley Focus Area

Partners for Fish and Wildlife in Colorado

Introduction and General Description

The San Luis Valley in south-central Colorado is a critical area for wetland restoration and migratory water birds. The valley is in an ancient lake bed approximately 100 miles long and 50 miles wide. Numerous large wetland complexes occur throughout the valley, supporting large concentrations of resident and migratory water birds. The Rio Grande River flows through the valley, and numerous small streams from surrounding mountains feed an immense aquifer. Agriculture, greasewood flats (*Sarcobates* spp.), wetlands, and riparian communities dominate the landscape. The Alamosa/Monte Vista National Wildlife Refuge complex is the key wetland component within the valley. The Nature Conservancy, Colorado Division of Wildlife, and Ducks Unlimited also have large wetland protection efforts ongoing with the valley.

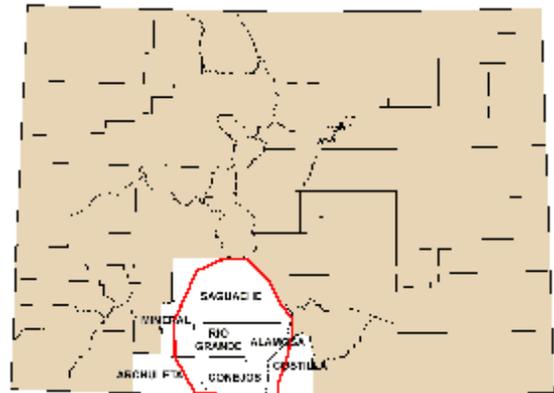
Habitats of Special Concern

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program has been focusing on wet meadow and riparian restorations. Wetland projects are designed to provide wet meadow habitat for foraging and nesting water birds. These projects are often associated with resting of upland

grasslands for nesting cover. Riparian habitat projects focus on restoration of native vegetation through fencing, revegetation, and grazing management. Riparian projects will benefit the endangered southwestern willow flycatcher as well as many other riparian-dependent species.

Threats

Development of resources including water, real estate, and agriculture are the primary threats to fish and wildlife resources in the San Luis Valley.



San Luis Valley Focus Area location map.

Conservation Strategies

The Partners for Fish and Wildlife Program, in conjunction with our partners (Colorado Division of Wildlife, Ducks Unlimited, The Nature Conservancy, and private landowners), has embarked on



Project site before.



Premium avocet nesting cover created by flooding lower areas with 2 inches of water while leaving higher dry spots for nest sites.

an ambitious conservation effort in the San Luis Valley. Fee title purchase, easements, and restoration of public and private lands are the principle strategies. The Partners Program provides the private lands habitat restoration component of this approach. Contour terraces with water control, fencing, grazing management, and revegetation of native plant communities are the primary techniques Partners projects have used.

The costs to restore wet meadow habitat range from \$50-\$200/acre.

Partners

Partners for Fish and Wildlife efforts in the San Luis Valley are possible because of dedicated landowners and:

Colorado Division of Wildlife
Great Outdoors Colorado
Ducks Unlimited
North American Wetland Conservation Fund
The Nature Conservancy
Natural Resources Conservation Service
Local water management and irrigation districts

Accomplishments

Since inception of the Partners Program in the valley in 1989, over 10,000 wetland acres have been restored. An additional 8,000 acres of upland habitat have been managed through our agreements. The total cost is often less than \$100/per for either habitat type.



An example of a good marsh project—limited open water, good interspersion of emergents, and excellent habitat for broods and aquatic insects.

Future Needs

- In the San Luis Valley, restoration of additional shallow water wetlands for nesting and foraging is expected to remain a major focus. About 30,000 acres of wetlands could be restored in this Focus Area.
- Riparian restoration projects need to increase in number and magnitude. In addition to assisting recovery of the Southwestern willow flycatcher, many other wildlife species will benefit. Over 150 miles of riparian habitat could be restored.



Bison grazing project.